

Statement by H.E. Dr. Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations (23 April 2002)

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh is happy to be participating in the discussion on this agenda item. We wish to express our sincere appreciation to Mr. Shashi Tharoor, the Interim Head of the Department of Public Information for his introductory remarks.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. I would like to make the following additional remarks.

Mr. Chairman,

The advancement in information technology has taken an unprecedented pace transforming all areas of human activity. Today, millions of people can access the information super highway. But the developed and the developing countries have a vast gulf in terms of their access to this technology. While the developed countries benefit by mutually sharing their know-how, the developing world is excluded. This imbalance needs to be corrected so that benefits are shared on a more just and equitable basis. It will be a pity if the developing countries are made to lag behind because of their lack of access to information or advanced means of obtaining information.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Bangladesh fully realizes the importance and potential of information technology. It has, therefore, accorded utmost priority to this sector. Some concrete measures have been taken to create a large pool of computer literates in the country. Computer learning has been introduced in schools and colleges. Cyber cafes have been established in different corners of the country, both by private and public initiative. The main focus of this drive is to build technological prowess with the ultimate objective of achieving economic development.

Mr. Chairman,

We fully agree with the Secretary General's assessment that there is a need to update and upgrade the UN's internal information technology capacity. This is necessary to make the entire UN system fully equipped and better integrated. This objective could only be achieved through efficient, qualified and experienced leadership. We are happy that the Department under the able leadership of Mr. Tharoor has fully committed to operate within a digital environment. We appreciate the good work done by DPI in running and re-designing the UN web page. It was amazing to know that the web site received 1.2 billion accesses last year. We have also noted with interest DPI's electronic mail-based news alert service which has been launched recently. We would encourage them to continue their work to the benefit of the

member states and to the wider audience outside, especially in the developing world. In this regard, we welcome Secretary General's initiative — the United Nations Information Technology Service (UNITeS) — for training groups of people in developing countries to apprise them of the uses and opportunities in the field of information technology.

Mr. Chairman,

DPI should not forsake traditional means of disseminating information such as radio and television to meet the needs of its diverse clientele while it continues to apply the latest advances. Strategies must be developed and strengthened towards this end. We are indeed impressed by the success of the live Radio project. However, we would suggest rescheduling of the broadcast time in Asia to the convenience of a larger audience. We would strongly urge the Department to maintain the current programmes in different non-official languages.

Mr. Chairman,

Bangladesh firmly believes that the UN Information Centres scattered around the globe are the real interface of the United Nations with the global community. These should serve as UN window to the outside world by disseminating knowledge and information on global affairs. We therefore insist that the independence and effectiveness of these Centres should be maintained. Wherever required, these should be strengthened. Unfortunately, the reverse trend has been the reality during the last few years. A large number of UNICs have been closed or merged with other offices. Speaking from our own experience we can say that this process has not only reduced the efficiency of the Centre, it has also effectively isolated the Centre from the targeted audience. The Dhaka Centre is a case in point. We have requested the Secretary-General to review the entire process of integration, with a view to making an objective assessment about the need and capacity of a Centre to deliver mandated programmes and activities.

Mr. Chairman,

We understand the necessity of reorientation and revitalization of DPI in order to improve performance, effectiveness and efficiency of the organization. This effort can only succeed if Member States give DPI the required resources to carry out this task. Any review should aim at strengthening DPI's role. Care should be taken not to restrict its activities. Programmes proven to have been effective should not be discontinued. The goal of the review should be to enable the DPI to provide timely and objective information on the work and achievements of the United Nations. This will generate international support for UN activities and promote international cooperation.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.